

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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R 240937Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9525
INFO AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION GENEVA
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SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION SITUATION UPDATE

REF: (A) ADDIS 3636 (NOTAL) (B) ADDIS 3392 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: IN CANDID DISCUSSION MINISTER OF
COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORTATION CLAIMED GENERAL
TRANSPORTATION SITUATION, INCLUDING ASSAB PORT, GRADUALLY
IMPROVING. ALTHOUGH REOPENING OF ETHIOPIAN-DJIBOUTI RAIL-
ROAD CREDITED WITH HELPING SOMEWHAT TO ALLEVIATE ASSAB PORT
CONGESTION, PMGSE PLANS CONCENTRATE IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS ON
ROAD TRANSPORT TO EXCLUSION OF RAILROAD, WHICH MEETS ONLY
TWO PERCENT OF FREIGHT HAULING NEEDS OF ETHIOPIA. COMMUNIST
TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON ASSAB PORT
IMPROVEMENT PLANS SEVERELY CRITICIZED. END SUMMARY.

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1. DURING LONG AND CORDIAL AUGUST 17 MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR
AND EMBASSY OFFICER, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND
TRANSPORTATION YUSUF AHMED GAVE FOLLOWING OVERVIEW OF
ETHIOPIAN TRANSPORT SITUATION.

2. ETHIOPIAN-DJIBOUTI RAILROAD - EACH MORNING TWO OR THREE
TRAINS DEPART FROM DJIBOUTI AND TWO OR THREE DEPART ADDIS.

ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN NO INSURGENT ATTACKS ON THE RAILROAD SINCE THE TWO ATTACKS IN JUNE, THE TRAINS CONTINUE TO MOVE ONLY DURING THE DAY. THE MAIN CARGO THUS FAR CARRIED FROM DJIBOUTI HAS BEEN FERTILIZER AND WATER, THE LATTER BEING NEEDED BY THE POPULACE ALONG THE RAILROAD BETWEEN THE BORDER AND DIRE DAWA. (OTHER SOURCES HAVE STATED THAT THREE OR FOUR PETROLEUM TANKCARS ARE INCLUDED IN THE DAILY TRAIN MAKEUP. SAME SOURCES TATED THAT TRAINS LEAVE FROM ADDIS NEARLY EMPTY. -ED.) PASSENGERS THUS FAR ARE CARRIED ONLY TO THE LAST TWON BEFORE THE BORDER, AS VISA, CUSTOMS AND SECURITY MATTERS ARE STILL NOT RESOLVED.

3. THE RAILROAD ACCOUNTS FOR ONLY TWO PERCENT OF THE TOTAL NON-MILITARY FREIGHT HAULED WITHIN ETHIOPIA. DESPITE THE RECENT ACQUISITION OF TWO NEW DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES FROM FRANCE, THE TOTAL EXPECTED TONNAGE TO BE HAULED BY THE RAILROAD FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE IS ABOUT 60 - 80,000 MT PER YEAR.

4. ALTHOUGH THE RAILROAD SYSTEM NEEDS TO BE REVITALIZED IN ALL ASPECTS, ROAD TRANSPORTATION, WHICH MEETS SOME 95 PERCENT OF ETHIOPIA'S NON-MILITARY FREIGHT REQUIREMENTS, IS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE RAILROAD AND THE PMGSE PLANS TO CONCENTRATE IMPROVEMENTS IN THIS AREA. EVEN FRENCH INTEREST IN REVITALIZING THE RAILROAD SEEMS TO BE COLLING. (CONTRADICTORY VIEW EXPRESSED BY FRENCH EMBASSY OFFICER WHO EARLIER TOLD EMBASSY OFFICER THAT FRANCE IS INTERESTED IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FINANCING RECONSTRUCTION OF THE RAILROAD AND HAS BEEN URGING PMGSE TO SEND TEAM TO FRANCE TO DISCUSS THE MATTER. HE EXPRESSED FEAR THAT COMMUNIST BLOC, ESPECIALLY EAST GERMANY, MIGHT TAKE A STRONG INTEREST IN THE RAILROAD. HE ADDED THAT DJIBOUTI AND ETHIOPIA SEEM TO BE MAKING PROGRESS ON IRONING OUT A NEW JOINT OPERATING ARRANGEMENT, WHICH GIVES DJIBOUTI MORE AUTHORITY OVER CUSTOMS, ETC. - ED.)

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5. MARITIME TRANSPORT AUTHORITY - IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PORT OPERATIONS. RECENTLY THERE HAVE BEEN STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE PORT OPERATIONS IN ASSAB (PROBABLY REFERS TO TAKEOVER BY PORT AUTHORITY OF ALL STEVEDORING FUNCTIONS AND APPOINTMENT OF NEW PORT MANAGER. - ED.) WHICH SEEM TO BE WORKING. ASSAB'S PORT SITUATION IS IMPROVING WITH ONLY 8 - 12 SHIPS AWAITING BERTHS AT ANY ONE TIME. DUE TO THE REOPENING OF THE DJIBOUTI-ADDIS RAILROAD, ONCE MORE SOME GENERAL CARGO AND ALL FERTILIZER DESTINED FOR ETHIOPIA IS BEING UNLOADED AT DJIBOUTI.

6. PMGSE PLANS TO EXPAND ASSAB PORT FACILITIES AND HAVE RECEIVED SOME TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (GDR). THUS FAR THIS ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN MINIMAL. WHEREAS PMGSE AUTHORITIES HAVE REQUESTED DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING PLANS AND COST ESTIMATES, THE GDR TECHNICIANS HAVE PROVIDED ONLY A RUDIMENTARY AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCOMPLETE VISUAL MOCKUP OF THE PROJECTED IMPROVED PORT. "I CANNOT UNDERSTAND THEIR SYSTEM OF DOING BUSINESS." IT IS WELL UNDERSTOOD BY ETHIOPIAN AUTHORITIES THAT SEPARATE SPECIALIZED HANDLING PROCEDURES AND FACILITIES ARE NEEDED FOR SUCH DIVERSE SPECIALIZED CARGO AS GRAINS, FERTILIZERS, PETROLEUM, SALT, MILITARY CARGO AND GENERAL CARGO.

7. AN INSPECTION TEAM RECENTLY TRAVELED TO MASSAWA TO PREPARE A REPORT ON THE DAMAGE AND RECONSTRUCTION NEEDS THERE, WHICH ARE BELIEVED TO BE EXTENSIVE. (OTHER SOURCES CLAIM MOBIL OIL CO. STILL HAS A PETROLEUM STORAGE CAPACITY AT MASSAWA OF 20 MILLION LITRES, WHILE AGIP LOST TO HOSTILE ACTION 13 OF 16 STORAGE TANKS, THE EQUIVALENT OF SOME 38 MILLION LITRES. - ED.) THERE ARE NO PLANS TO BEGIN RECONSTRUCTING MASSAWA;

IT WOULD BE USELESS UNTIL THE MASSAWA-ASMARA ROAD IS SECURED.

8. NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMPANY (NATRACO) - RECENTLY HAS INSTITUTED IMPROVED PROCEDURES WHICH HAVE RESULTED IN REDUCING FROM ONE MONTH TO ONE WEEK THE TIME IN WHICH A GIVEN AMOUNT OF CARGO IS MOVED FROM ASSAB TO ADDIS ABABA. TRUCKS NOW TRAVEL AT NIGHT, THE CONVOY SYSTEM IS NO LONGER IN USE, DRIVERS OF TRUCKS STANDING IDLE (INCLUDING DURING LOADING OR UNLOADING) FOR MORE THAN FIVE HOURS ARE FINED, MOBILE MAINTENANCE SHOPS PATROL THE HIGHWAY, ETC. IN ADDITION, PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS AND FIRMS, INCLUDING COFFEE EXPORTING FIRMS, AGAIN ARE BEGINNING TO PURCHASE THEIR TRUCKS, AND THEY OPERATE MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY THAN THE GOVERNMENT OWNED FLEET. (COFFEE EXPORTING FIRMS WERE PRESSURED BY PMGSE INTO BUYING OWN TRUCKS, BUT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN TOTALLY UNHAPPY ABOUT IT. - ED.)

9. AT PRESENT THERE IS AN ALL DIESEL FLEET OF SOME 800 TRUCK/TRAILERS ON THE ASSAB-ADDIS ABABA ROUTE. THIS FLEET LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IS COMPOSED MAINLY OF FIAT VEHICLES, WITH SOME MERCEDES AND A LESSER NUMBER OF VOLVOS. NATRACO HAS NO INTEREST IN OBTAINING SOVIET OR EAST GERMAN (IFA) TRUCKS. VEHICLES FROM THESE COUNTRIES HAVE BECOME A JOKE WITHIN ETHIOPIA; FUEL (GASOLINE) CONSUMPTION IS HIGH, CAPACITY IS LOW, GENERAL PERFORMANCE IS POOR, THEY ARE TECHNICALLY OUTMODED, AND THERE ARE NO SPARES OR MAINTENANCE FACILITIES AVAILABLE. (OTHER SOURCES HAVE REPEATED WIDESPREAD CRITICISM OF THESE TRUCKS, CITING ADDITIONAL DEFECTS SUCH AS POOR CLUTCHES AND OVERHEATING. - ED.) DESPITE A GROWING TRUCK FLEET, THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IS STILL UNABLE TO COPE DUE TO THE LONGER ROUTES TO SERVICE INTO THE OGADEN AND ERITREA. COMMENT: MINISTER YUSUF APPEARED TO BE COMPLETELY CANDID IN HIS REMARKS, MANY OF WHICH ARE CONFIRMED BY OTHER SOURCES. CHAPIN

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